

The Sydenham House
720 De Graw Avenue
Newark, Essex County, New Jersey

HABS-NJ-148

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
District of New Jersey

SYDENHAM
FOLLOWS

Historic American Buildings Survey
Seymour Williams, A.I.A., District Officer
133 Central Avenue, Rahway, New Jersey

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NEWARK

5.

The Sydenham House
720 De Graw Avenue
Newark, Essex County, New Jersey

Owner: The Misses Topping

Date of Erection: Third quarter of the eighteenth
century

Architect:

Builder: John Sydenham

Present Condition: Poor

Number of Stories: Two

Materials of Construction: Foundation - stone

Exterior walls - stone first
floor except the southeast
portion which is frame; second
floor frame; all of the stone
is covered with stucco except
the north wall

Interior walls - plaster

Inside brick chimneys

Roof - pitch

Historical Data:

The Sydenham family is English. The name
comes from the river Syd. The first introduction of
the Sydenham family to Jersey came about 1711 when
John Sydenham eloped with Susannah Hancock. John

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Sydenham, according to the story, just happened along and fell desperately in love with Susannah, the only daughter of Edward Hancock; however, Hancock frowned upon the courtship and locked his daughter in an upper room. The couple escaped one night and were married. Apparently they were soon forgiven, for in 1711 there is a deed granting to John Sydenham four acres of land on the highway to Acquackanonk, and six acres on the highway to Waterson.

The house of the survey is not the original house of 1711. The present building is known to be over 150 years old, and is built on an earlier site. The Dutch oven was a part of the earlier structure.

The name of the family has been variously spelled as Sydenham, Sidnham, Sydingham, and finally Sidman.

Bibliography:

Family records taken from the Bible in possession of Miss Laura M. Sidman, Plainfield, Union County, New Jersey

Hine, C.S. Woodside Its History, Legends and Ghost Stories Hine's Annual, 1909

Walter E. Ritt
Supervising Historian

Approved:

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SEYMOUR WILLIAMS, A.I.A.
District Officer

Reviewed
Sept 2, 1936
HWS

John Sydenham House
Old Road to Bloomfield
Newark
Essex County
New Jersey

HABS No. NJ-148

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Addendum to
The Sydenham House
720 De Graw Avenue
Newark
Essex County
New Jersey

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

JOHN SYDENHAM HOUSE

HABS No. NJ-148

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Addendum to:
The Sydenham House
720 DeGraw Avenue
Newark
Essex County
New Jersey

Location: Old Road to Bloomfield (change in address reflects change in entrance used as the main entrance)
Newark, Essex County, New Jersey

Significance: The structure is one of the two oldest extant buildings in Newark and is a fine example of vernacular construction. Owned by one family for over 200 years, the building exhibits an evolutionary pattern of growth.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: Constructed in stages from the early 18th century through early 19th century.
2. Architect: Unknown.
3. Original and subsequent owners: In 1711, John Sydenham, a cordwainer, married Susannah Hancock, daughter of Edward Hancock, a prosperous local landowner. That same year, Hancock presented his new son-in-law with 4 acres of land, upon which the Sydenham house was constructed. The building remained in the Sydenham family (later known as the Sidman family) until the 1920s, when it was purchased by Dr. G. Rae Lewis. For approximately 30 years, Lewis' sisters-in-law, Edith and Elsie Topping, lived in the house. Then, in 1954, the property was purchased by Dorland and Elizabeth Henderson. As of 1976, the Hendersons planned to bequeath the house to the Newark Museum.
4. Alterations & additions: The Sydenham House evolved over more than a century. While physical evidence provides clues to the house's development, an exact progression of dates cannot be determined.

Apparently, the oldest section of the house is the cellar under the dining room, which apparently was a root cellar, dating to 1711 or earlier. Above this was constructed a one-room, 1-1/2-story stone house with frame lean-to. This is the area now currently the dining room and kitchen.

Later, a two-room, 1-1/2-story stone addition was added on the northwest. This is the area now comprising the sitting room, front hall and front parlor. At some point, the rear pantry was also added. Later, the pantry was incorporated into the house when the rear hall and rear parlor were added. The final major alteration was the raising of the original salt box roof.

After the Hendersons purchased the house in 1954, they proceeded to renovate the building. The front facade, from the front door to the northwest corner, and the northwest wall were disassembled and rebuilt. Several window and sashes have had to be replaced. On the interior, lath and plaster ceilings, which were not original features, were removed. In the kitchen, the closed fireplace was reopened and a replacement mantel installed. The above are some of the major changes which occurred during the renovation, which also included general upgrading of the building.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: A fine example of vernacular stone and frame construction. The present appearance of the house is the result of distinct evolutionary development.
2. Condition of fabric: Good.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: This rectangular house measures 60' (six-bay front) by 32'. It consists of two sections; one section is 1-1/2 stories, the other is 2-1/2 stories.
2. Foundations: Stone. Under the dining room, the foundations are roughly squared sandstone laid without mortar.
3. Walls: First floor walls are stone; second floor walls are frame sheathed in clapboards.
4. Structural system: Wood interior framing with overlapping beams of oak and pine. Oak logs, adzed flat on top, support the dining room. These beams are older than the floor boards and were probably part of the original root cellar. The sitting room and front parlor are supported by 10"x11" oak beams, adzed roughly square.

5. Porches, bulkheads: There is a shed-roofed hood over the kitchen door. Bulkheads are located near the rear entrance and on the southeast facade.
 6. Chimneys: There are four brick chimneys; two inside chimneys at the end of the northwest facade, one inside chimney near the juncture of the two sections of the house, and one outside end chimney on the southeast facade.
 7. Openings:
 - a. Doorways & doors: The recessed main doorway is located in the southwest facade. It contains a simple batten door. On the northeast rear, there is a second recessed doorway with a six-panel wooden door.
 - b. Windows & shutters: Fenestration is irregular. However, except for a lunette in the northwest gable, all are wooden double-hung sash windows, variously 4/4, 6/6, 12/12, etc.
 8. Roof:
 - a. Shape: Gable roof.
 - b. Eaves: Slight overhang
- C. Description of Interior:
1. Floor plans:
 - a. Basement: Basement extends under dining room, sitting room and front parlor. The earliest cellar, under the dining room, originally had two entrances, one of which was closed by a wall when the second part of the basement was constructed. In the late 19th century, this entrance was partially reopened in an effort to connect to the two parts of the basement. The opening was completed in the 20th century by the Hendersons.
 - b. First floor: The main entrance opens into a hall containing the main stair to the second floor. Opening off the hall are the front parlor, rear parlor, sitting room and pantry. Off of the sitting room and pantry are the dining room and kitchen, respectively. A beehive oven projects off of the exterior wall of the kitchen.
 - c. Second floor: An irregularly shaped hallway runs northwest-southeast. Opening off this hallway are nine rooms, including three bedrooms, dressing room, library, storeroom, sitting room, bathroom and weaving room.

2. Stairways: Main stair located in hall; secondary stair off of pantry.
3. Flooring: Random-width boards.
4. Wall & ceiling finish: Exposed beams and plaster on the first floor. Plaster on the second floor.
5. Decorative features & trim: Several original fireplace surrounds. The front parlor surround is particularly attractive with its simple Federal-style design.
6. Mechanical equipment: All equipment has been modernized, but with a desire to make as little impact on the historic fabric of the building as possible.

D. Site:

1. General setting & location: Oriented northwest-southeast on a wooded lot. There is a well just northeast of the house.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Bibliography:

1. Primary & unpublished sources:

Written information provided by owners, Dorland and Elizabeth Henderson

National Register of Historic Places Inventory Form

2. Secondary & published sources:

Eugene T. Murphy, "A New Life for a Part of Old Newark,"
Metro Newark!, Jan-Feb. 1976.

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